



**Ohio House of Representatives
Health Committee
House Bill 96
Kezia Ofosu Atta, Director of Advocacy
American Lung Association, Ohio
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Chair Schmidt, Vice Chair Deeter, Ranking Member Somani, and members of the House Health Committee, my name is Kezia Ofosu Atta. I am the Director of Advocacy for the American Lung Association in Ohio. The Lung Association is the nation's oldest voluntary public health organization with a mission to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease. We do this through education, advocacy, and research.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the tobacco provisions in House Bill 96. I am here today to join fellow advocates and urge the Ohio legislature to prioritize the health and lungs of Ohioans by raising our state's cigarette tax by \$1.50.

The Lung Association strongly supports an increase in the state's cigarette tax, which has not increased since 2015. We believe that this proven public health strategy is long overdue. Effective, science-based policies such as these lead to quit attempts and prevent youth initiation of tobacco products. Every 10% tax increase in cigarettes leads to a reduction in consumption by 4% among adults and 7% among youths, making it one of the most effective ways to reduce tobacco use, especially among the youth. In Ohio, 20.4% of high school students use tobacco products annually, and 3.3%, which is approximately 20,000 plus, smoke every year. Among this population, 18.8% use e-cigarettes. The middle school smoking rate is even more alarming, at 3.1%.

In our recently released State of Tobacco Control Report, Ohio received an "F" grade in the Tobacco Tax category. The grade is mainly due to the low cigarette tax and the lack of equalization of tax across all tobacco products. HB 96 corrects this by significantly increasing the cigarette tax and equalizing the tax to 42% of wholesale price for most tobacco products, creating parity with the cigarette tax. However, for vapor products,

HB 96 falls short by increasing the tax but relying on volume. We would urge the Committee to amend the measure and tax all other tobacco products, including vapor products, at 42% of wholesale.

Additionally, the Lung Association supports the vapor distribution license provision which brings accountability to vaped tobacco product distributors, allowing for better enforcement of our state's tobacco regulations. Lastly, HB 96 attempts to address youth tobacco initiation by addressing flavored tobacco products; as we know that flavors are attractive to youth and used by the industry to lure kids to their products. However, as currently introduced, HB 96 only partially addresses the problem by ending the sale of flavored vapor products. The Lung Association urges the committee to extend the flavor restrictions to all tobacco products, as only addressing one product, would create a loophole, leading consumers, and youth to pursue other addictive flavored tobacco products such as little cigars or nicotine pouches which are seeing a surge in use among our kids.

Tobacco use remains that tobacco is the leading cause of preventable death and disease in Ohio and the nation. Diseases such as lung cancer, COPD, asthma, and stroke are all caused and irritated by the use and exposure to cigarettes and tobacco products. In fact, 33.5% of cancer deaths are attributed to smoking. Today, 1.381 million adult Ohioans smoke cigarettes, making up 15% of the population; and 20.4% of High School students use some form of tobacco products. Both of these rates are higher than the national average and we urge the Ohio legislature to at a minimum support the Governor's recommended funding increase for the Tobacco Prevention and Control Program bringing funding to \$10 million. We currently only cover 7.8% of the \$132million recommendation by the United States Center for Disease Control and Prevention (US CDC). It is of interest to know that Big Tobacco spends approximately \$409.6 million annually, just in Ohio to advertise cigarette and tobacco products, appealing to youth and taking advantage of vulnerable communities – meaning for every \$1 the state spends to prevent tobacco addiction, the industry spends \$40 to hook the next generation.

Members of the legislature must protect their constituents from the dangers of tobacco which kills approximately 20,000 people in Ohio annually. The American Lung Association supports strong tobacco prevention policies that are proven to reduce tobacco rates, and the provisions included in the Governor's and the House's version of

the budget discussed in my testimony do precisely that, putting the health and lungs of Ohioans first.

I am happy to answer any questions.

Data Note: All data shared in this testimony is available in American Lung Association's [2025 State of Tobacco Control Ohio Report](#), except Cancer Deaths and Big Tobacco Advertisement Data that are sourced from the [Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids](#).